

## Toowoomba Brief

### **Background**

Toowoomba and the areas of response have doubled in population since the last increase in manning to approx 155,000 people.

This increase occurred when Anzac Ave Fire Station was built in 1974 and a crew of 4 were relocated from Kitchener St. At this time the operational crew numbers were 60, this has decreased until today we only have 48 operational fire-fighters and officers.

During this time the Administration staffing levels have increased from 1.5 people to an estimated Administration staff number of approx 73 people.

### **Current Situation**

#### **The QFRS Assistant Commissioners View's**

I making this submission we totally support the Assistant Commissioners views relating to the increase in appliance numbers and crewing and are not at odds with his views:-

Assistant Commissioner Tom Dawson was quoted as saying in The Chronicle June 10, 2010:-

*He said he had been lobbying the Commissioner in Brisbane for more resources in his five years in the job.*

*"I am optimistic we are getting close to some growth in Operational capacity" Mr Dawson said.*

### **Capacity**

When making a capability comparison between the other emergency services:-

Police – can respond to multiple incidents.

Ambulance - can respond to multiple incidents.

QFRS – has only the capacity to respond to (1) one house fire/car accident at once.

Toowoomba also has the Regional responsibility of the provision of Specialist Response equipment(4hrs by road, rest of Region fly out) such as :-

- Heavy Rescue Response

- Technical Rescue :-
  - Swiftwater rescue
  - Trench rescue
  - Industrial rescue
  - USAR
  - Vertical rescue
  - Confined Space rescue
- Breathing Apparatus support
- Hazardous Materials incident support
- CBR technical response
- Command and Control

While the crews have no hesitation in responding to these complex incidents it comes at a cost and that is the available on shift crew manning will drop from 10 between the 2 stations to 8.

We have now been advised that even due to operations there will be NO call back to man the remaining Specialist appliances once the 1<sup>st</sup> Specialist crew have gone.

As recently as 10/6/2010 this drop in operational capacity was highlighted when a chemical incident closed the Gore Highway at Millmerran and the Specialist crew from Toowoomba were on scene for 20 hrs. This meant that while the Breathing Apparatus/ Hazmat appliance was at this incident, management refused to provide crewing for the Regional Heavy Rescue appliance.

### **Other impacts**

#### **Thinning of Resources**

The satellite townships of Pittsworth, Oakey, Goombungee and Highfields ALL have suffered from lack of response capacity due to low or NO manning which results on an increasingly regular basis in one or both of the Toowoomba Area appliances being out of town for extended periods of time leaving Toowoomba with only one pumping appliance.

The staff call back or Auxiliary call back system is slow and in the case of the Toowoomba Auxiliary's the average response time to leave the station is 16.5 mins, and on scene time is 24mins. Additionally the response numbers are not always at the standard required for Queensland's largest inland city.

#### **Transport Risks**

In conducting a draw down from the Dept of Transport website there is now a heavy transport travelling through the main feeder of the Warrego Highway (James St, Toowoomba) every 20 seconds with every conceivable type of Dangerous Goods load.

This volume is increasing exponentially at 21% per year.

#### **Highfields**

This area is increasing rapidly and is currently not being serviced correctly in line with the Fire Service Levy.

The Levy that is being charged is a A2 Class, which means that this satellite town (17kms from Toowoomba) should be staffed by 24/7 crews is currently not, and is in fact being serviced by what is the equivalent of a D Class levy.

### **Charlton Transport Interchange and Industrial Area**

This area located on the western fringe of Toowoomba has been earmarked as the location for the major transport interchange and is developing rapidly.

There is a number of hazardous transport or chemical storage facilities in this area; one has 19,000t of hazardous materials in storage.

### **Rapid Coal and Gas Industry Expansion**

As has recently been announced by Government the South West Region is undergoing exceptional growth in the areas of Power generation, Coal mining and transport, Ethanol production and Coal Seam gas production.

The knock on effect is an increased risk potential in:-

- Transport Incidents (Road and Rail and gas pipelines)
- 34, 000 gas wells to be drilled in the next 10 years
- Heavy rescue incidents at Power stations, Coal mines or gas well heads
- Increasing volumes of Hazardous materials being produced or transported such as:-
  - Ammonia
  - Ethanol (15 – 20 million litres/ plant, one in operation 8 are planned)
  - Explosives

## **Conclusion**

Currently in the Toowoomba area we have a very limited operational capacity to service anything other than one house fire, one hazmat incident or road traffic crash.

The community to which we serve and are part of deserves a far better response capacity in a timely manner than is currently served with a minimalist service that has no reserve capacity to respond to more than incident at once safely.

Finally we have been advised by our Assistant Commissioner that we should wait until a 3<sup>rd</sup> appliance arrives before interior operations commence at a structure fire to reduce Firefighter injuries under Zero Harm.

Knowing that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pumping appliance will take an average of 24 mins to attend, how defensible will be our current position be when we inform the public that due to economic rationalism a internal rescue will not occur and a person dies, or a person trapped under a truck or train is going to have to wait until Ipswich get there if there is no crewing available for that rescue appliance.

The list of potential news headlines goes on and on, Dalby can get more people and appliances out the door to an incident.

We need a 3<sup>rd</sup> fully crewed 24/7 pumping appliance NOW, not 10 years from now, as not only has the horse bolted, but its died of old age.